

AN

HISTORICAL SKETCH

OF THE

Redwood Library and Athenæum,

IN

NEWPORT, RHODE ISLAND.

BY DAVID KING, M. D.



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Among the causes of American civilization, the formation of early colonial libraries, naturally occupies a prominent place. The early libraries were connected with the churches, or with the universities, or were formed by associations of gentlemen in the different colonies. Among the former, the society for the propagation of the gospel in foreign parts, undoubtedly effected much for the general enlightenment of the colonies by the distribution of books and tracts, and by the establishment of Libraries in connection with the principal Episcopal churches.

Thus, from 1702 to 1728 that society had distributed among the inhabitants of the colonies above eight thousand volumes of books, and above one hundred thousand small tracts of devotion and instruction. The other churches and the various colleges by their libraries must have likewise contributed to promote the early intellectual and moral improvement of the people. Indeed the best portion of English literature, in that age, was presented to the American mind, and grasping it, as it did with eagerness, all its powers were quickened by the learning and genius of the mother country.

Among the libraries that accomplished a good work for American civilization was the Redwood Library, founded in 1747, at Newport, Rhode Island. Its members had formed an association for literary purposes in 1730 under the auspices of Bishop Berkley, who resided at Newport from 1729 to 1731. The association gradually aspired to the formation of a library company. In 1747, through the generosity of

29 May 1861 A.

Abraham Redwood, Esq., there was placed at their disposal the large sum of £500 sterling for the purchase of standard books in London. From Henry Collius, Esq., they received an appropriate building site for their library, then called Bowling Green. For the erection of a library building five thousand pounds were almost immediately subscribed by one hundred gentlemen, who constituted the association. The library building, which was a beautiful specimen of the Doric order, was begun in 1748, and completed in 1750, from a plan furnished by Peter Harrison, Esq., the assistant architect of Blenheim house, England. While the library was in process of building, the catalogue which had received much careful consideration from its members, was transmitted to London, where with a few alterations by Peter Collinson, Esq., it was, immediately, at the full cost of £500 sterling, purchased. In 1750, it had arrived and was placed on the shelves of the library, and, was generally considered by American scholars as the finest collection of works on theology, history, the arts and sciences, at that time in the American colonies. An examination of the statistics of American libraries, shows, that the *Redwood Library* stands in the front ranks, as a colonial library, which, from the first, was endowed with a charter of incorporation, possessed of an appropriate and well-designed library building, and furnished with books, that involved the expenditure in London, of a larger sum of money, than, had at any time previously, been transmitted from any of the colonies, for that purpose. It would be interesting to give here, the catalogue of the English and classical works which were deemed at that time, a complete and well-appointed library—did space permit our so doing. The names of the liberal founders of the Redwood Library—a colonial one, at an early period of our civilization, should at least be preserved.*

The beneficial influences of this library in colonial times, must have been great. The Rev. Dr. Ezra Stiles has acknowledged his indebted-

* Abraham Redwood, Rev. James Honyman, Edward Scott, Simon Pease, Thomas Moffatt, M. D., John Brett, M. D., William Paul, John Channing, Jabbeel Brenton, David Cheeseborough, William Vernon, John Brown, Daniel Updike, Daniel Ayrault, Jr., Abraham Borden, Henry Collins, Joseph Jacob, Samuel Rodman, Samuel Wickham, Thomas Ward, Josias Lyndon, Peter Bours, Charles Wickham, John Easton, Joseph Sylvester, Thomas Wickham, John Tillinghast, Joseph Harrison, Clark Rodman M. D., Rev. William Vinal, Walter Rodman, M. D., James Honyman, Jr., Samuel Ward, Rev. John Callender, John Bennet, Joseph Scott, Ebenezer Gray, M. D., Joseph Phillips, Benjamin Hazard, Rev. James Searing, Samuel Vernon, Benjamin Wickham, John Gardner, Jonathan Nichols, Stephen Wanton, Patrick Grant.

November 4, 1847. Gideon Wanton, Joseph Wanton, Joseph Whipple, Jr., William Ellery, Walter Chaloner, Jonathan Thurston, Samuel Holmes, Godfrey Malbone, Jr., Charles Bowler, Gideon Cornell, Robert Croke, John Collins, John Dennis, Abraham Hart, Matthew Robinson, William Dunbar, John Chaloner, John Jepson.

ness to it for his useful, curious, and recondite learning. It was from this library that he furnished himself with armor for the great and growing contest in the American colonies. The late Dr. William Ellery Channing, says of him. "To the influences of this distinguished man, in the circle in which I was brought up, I may owe in part, the indignation which I feel towards every invasion of human rights. In my earliest years I regarded no one with equal reverence." A similar auspicious influence, on the character, intelligence and public spirit of the town, on her rising statesmen, her liberal merchants, her cultured scholars and her able lawyers, must be attributed to the Redwood library. It should likewise be recollected that it attracted many of our literary men in the English colonies, who availed themselves of its treasures, while enjoying the delights of our climate. From the Carolinas, from the West Indies, from New York and Boston, they came here as to a paradise on earth, to replenish their stock of health and their stores of knowledge, ere they returned to their native climes. "The library of Rhode Island though built of wood," says a fellow of Trinity College, Dublin, who passed his youth at Newport before the revolution, in the "still air of delightful studies," was a structure of uncommon beauty. I remember it with admiration, and I could once appeal to the known taste of an old school-fellow (Stuart the painter) who had the same feeling towards it."

From 1778 to 1785 the tumults of war interrupted the meetings of the library company, while the town was occupied successively by the English, the American and the French forces.

The library undoubtedly suffered some losses by the occasional purloining of books, but considering its exposed position, from the dispersion and occupation of its natural guardians, it was remarkably preserved from injury and depredation. But at the close of the war it was discovered that many of the books were missing from the shelves, that the building and fences had fallen into decay; that in consequence of death or removal from the State, thirty-three members and proprietors only, were left to manage the affairs of the company, and to carry out the generous and noble intentions of its founder and of its other generous benefactors. With a view to restore the institution, an able committee was appointed in September, 1785, to apply to the legislature for a renewal of the charter. They were not successful till October, 1790, when the charter was renewed, and still farther amended in May, 1791.

In September, 1806 it was resolved to apply to the legislature for a lottery to raise three thousand dollars, and for the admission of thirty new members on paying twenty-five dollars each for a share in the

library. On the 13th of March, 1810, the company adopted a successful measure for the revival of the institution, in the admission of so many new members, on the payment of fifteen dollars each, as should carry the whole number of proprietors to one hundred. This number was long considered as fulfilling Mr. Redwood's ideal of a library company. In October, 1810, the proprietors appointed a committee consisting of William Hunter, Benjamin Hazard, Edmund Waring, David King, William Marchant and John L. Boss, Jr., to prepare an address, and to present the same to the public, for the purpose of obtaining donations of books to the library. This direct appeal to the public contributed to revive the interest, already directed towards the Library, and to encourage the spirit of liberality now re-awakened by the example of generous and high-minded individuals.

In January, 1810, James Ogilvie, Esq., a great rhetorician of that day, visited the town and delivered several lectures on the advantages of public libraries, which contributed essentially to awaken the public to the claims to the Redwood Library on their generosity and support.

In 1813 Solomon Southwick, Esq., of Albany, gave to the library one hundred and twenty acres of land in the State of New York, for the purpose of advancing the institution, and thereby perpetuating the memory of Henry Collins, Esq., one of its principal founders.

In 1834 Abraham Redwood, Esq., of Dorset Place, Marylebone, England, being desirous of promoting the institution founded by his honored grandfather, gave to the company, the homestead estate, situated in Newport which he inherited from his father Jonas L. Redwood, Esq. Through the instrumentality of Robert Johnston, Esq., the public records of England, as far as then published consisting of 84 volumes, viz.: 72 large folios and 12 octavos were presented by the British government. It is to be regretted that the volumes subsequently published have not been obtained by the library.

In 1837, Baron Hottinguer, a distinguished banker of Paris, who was connected by marriage with the Redwood family, presented to the company 1,000 francs for the restoration of the building.

In 1840 the honorable Christopher G. Champlin bequeathed to the company 100 dollars and some valuable books.

In 1844, the library company received from Judah Touro, Esq., of New Orleans, (a native of Newport), the gift of 2,000 dollars, which sum according to the wish of the donor, was appropriated to the repairs of the portico of the building and to the laying of a sidewalk in East Touro street from the library building to the corner of Kay street. Mr. Touro at his death in 1854, left a bequest of three thousand dollars to

promote the interests of the institution. The Centennial Anniversary of the incorporation of the Redwood Library company was celebrated August 24, 1847 by the delivery of an able and eloquent discourse by the Hon. William Hunter, and by an appropriate and beautiful poem by the Rev. Charles T. Brooks.

In September, 1855, it was resolved to promote the usefulness of the institution by increasing its resources, viz.: by the sale of four hundred new shares at twenty-five dollars a share for the purpose of enlarging the library building, increasing the number of books, attaching a reading room to the Library, and opening it daily to the public. A circular was prepared by Dr. King, the president, exhibiting the condition and resources of the institution and presenting the proposed plan for improving the Redwood Library and Athenæum, and the terms of admission to its present and prospective privileges.

In January, 1856, the charter was amended, so that the company were enabled to elect from the members, at the annual meetings, a president and *eleven* directors, instead of *five* directors, as formerly. In 1861, an additional act was passed by the legislature, authorizing the corporation, annually, to elect a vice-president, and not exceeding, eight additional directors. In January, 1867, an act was adopted by the legislature, allowing the Library company to issue "preferred" shares, and to increase the number of directors to twenty-five. It was not till September, 1858, that the whole stock of new shares was taken. It is not more than just to mention with praise the zeal and energy of the Hon. William C. Cozzens and on this occasion the liberality of subscriptions of Messrs. Charles H. Russell, Edward King, William S. Wetmore, Sidney Brooks and James Lenox. The whole subscription was highly creditable to all the proprietors who then participated in increasing the power and resources of the institution. With these funds, the directors proceeded to enlarge the building, preserving as far as possible the original design of Mr. Peter Harrison, the first architect. By the aid of Mr. Snell, of Boston, the architect, they were enabled to add a principal room, fifty feet long, twenty-eight feet wide and nineteen feet high, lighted by six windows on the north and south façades and by an octagonal dome, or lantern light, the whole beautifully frescoed, supplied with gas lights and warmed by a furnace. The room for books was still further increased by the extension of the original wings and by central openings into the old Library room. The corporation also expended in the purchase of valuable books about 4,000 dollars with the assistance of Joseph G. Cogswell, Esq., of the Astor Library. They added a gallery of paintings, being enabled to enrich the gallery, by the munifi-

cent donation of Charles B. King, Esq., a native of Newport with upwards of 200 valuable paintings, many of them by his own hand, and some by other distinguished artists. In the gallery of pictures are to be found paintings given by David Melville, Miss J. Stuart, Mrs. Catharine Allen, Usher Parsons, M. D., Augustus N. Littlefield, C. H. Olmstead, of New Haven, Russell Coggeshall, George C. Mason, William N. Mercer, M. D., and John Purssord, Esq., of London. The library building was opened to the public in July, 1859.

In the winter of 1859-60 an inaugural discourse on the advantages of public libraries was delivered by the Hon. Geo. G. King, president of the institution, who was followed by various gentlemen, in a course of free lectures instituted at that period by the directors.

In 1860 was presented to the Library by Sidney Brooks, Esq., a valuable collection of French books, illustrative of art and military life, embracing a donation of eighty-one volumes—3 folios, 3 quartos and 75 octavos.

A donation was presented by the Hon. David Sears, consisting of seven volumes quarto of Plymouth colony records; 6 volumes quarto of Massachusetts records, and eighteen volumes octavo of Massachusetts Historical Society collection. Also by James Lenox, Esq., his privately printed copy of the "*Opusculum de Insulis Nuper Inventis*" by Nicolaus Lyllacius, first published in 1494. Also was presented by John Purssord of London, a portrait of Abraham Redwood, the grandson of the founder.

In August, 1862, twenty pictures were received from the executor of the estate of Charles B. King, Esq., in addition to a donation of forty-two made by Mr. King the year before. Also a specific donation of the Library of Charles B. King, Esq., consisting of 391 volumes of books, of which 31 volumes are illustrated works; 14 volumes of bound engravings of various sizes from large quarto to large folio. Also three portfolios of unbound engravings. Also Mr. King bequeathed to the Redwood Library one-quarter of the residuary portion of his estate, real and personal.

In 1864, it was announced by the President, the Hon. George G. King, that the whole sum received by Library from the late Charles B. King, Esq., was in cash, \$8,913.70; the whole sum being paid in 1863 and 1864. And that in addition to this sum must be added, the estimated value of books, engravings and paintings—the mere inventory price of which was \$2,000. Among the donations received this year, were two hundred and nine volumes of the best authors, from James Lenox, Esq., some of these are rare reprints relating to the early history of

our country. From the widow of Dr. Benjamin Waterhouse, the bequest of the portrait of her late husband and the portrait of Gilbert Stuart the artist, both by Stuart, were received.

In April, 1865, Dr. William I. Walker, a temporary resident of Newport, left the generous bequest of ten thousand dollars to the library. This year the Clarke estate was purchased for the sum of fifteen thousand dollars, toward the purchase of which the library received \$500—the generous gift of Alfred Smith, Esq.

In 1867, cork models of the coliseum, models of the fragments of two Roman temples, and a model of the arch of Constantine, all from the estate of Miss Sarah Gibbs, were presented through the instrumentality of Hon. W. C. Gibbs, administrator.

In 1868, Mr. Charles H. Russell and Mr. H. Hoppin, presented plans for the enlargement of the Library edifice, as devised by Mr. R. H. Hunt. In 1869, Dr. David King, in behalf of Miss Elizabeth F. Thomas and other descendants of Peter Harrison, Esq., the first architect of the Redwood Library, presented the portraits of Mr. Harrison and his wife.

In 1863, Mr. Edward King had offered his valuable collection of statuary to the Library, on condition that a suitable place should be provided for it. This year, he consented to place the statuary in the Library building; hoping that more room would be given when the building should be enlarged. The subjects are copies in marble from the antique, of the "Dying Gladiator," and the busts of the "Venus of Milo," "Ariadne," "Demosthenes," "Cicero," and the "Young Marcellus,"—all being the work of Paul Akers; also an original work by James Mozier, the "American School-boy." The president and eighteen members raised at this time, \$1,600 to pay off a debt of the institution.

Hon. George G. King, the president, at his death, July 17, 1870, left the Society a bequest of one thousand dollars, to constitute a part of the permanent fund for the purchase of books. In December, 1869, through Henry Ledyard, Esq., the Library received two noble offers from George W. Gibbs, Esq.; first, that if the Directors would raise by subscription the sum of five hundred dollars for the purchase of books, he would subscribe five hundred dollars more. Whereupon in the course of 1870, twenty-five individuals subscribed nine hundred and fifty dollars, which, added to Mr. Gibbs' five hundred made, a fund of \$1,450 for the purchase of books. The second proposition was, that if the Library would raise by subscription ten thousand dollars for enlarging the building, he would contribute an additional ten thousand dollars.

In 1871, the Library received a benefaction from Mrs. Maria D'Wolf Rogers, consisting of three thousand dollars' worth of rare and valuable books, and a special fund of one thousand dollars, the income to be used only for the purchase of books. The benefaction is to be perpetually held as a memorial of the late Robert Rogers, Esq., of Bristol. It was announced that Edward King, Esq., the executor of the late Hon. George G. King, had paid over the legacy in full, and that it had been invested in the savings bank as the nucleus of a book fund. Twenty-eight shares had been converted into \$100 shares, the holders surrendering the \$25 shares, and paying in cash, \$75 each, and four shares were taken by new parties, at \$100 each. Seven of the "preferred" shares had been taken in the previous years.

During the year 1872, two special shares were taken at \$100 each, and fourteen were taken by original shareholders, on the payment of seventy-five dollars and a surrender of a present twenty-five dollar share, thus making the special share fund on deposit in the savings bank \$4,075. The Gibbs building fund was made up this year, and placed in the Trust Company on deposit, the whole sum being \$20,025. William Sanford Rogers, Esq., of Boston, a native of Newport, left a bequest of four thousand dollars, the income to be applied to the purchase of books.

In 1874, a generous bequest of \$5,000 was left to the library by John Carter Brown, Esq., as a library fund. The library company adopted this year a plan presented by George C. Mason, architect for the enlargement of the building. They appointed C. H. Russell, Sidney Brooks, and John T. Bush, Esqs., the building committee to superintend the erection of the new structure. The master builders, Perry G. Case & Co., contracted to have the new building constructed of stone and brick, and to have it completed by December 1, 1875, according to the plans and specifications, for which purpose \$25,000 were appropriated.

In 1875, Mrs. Lucy K. Tuckerman presented to the Library the works of the late Henry T. Tuckerman, Esq., also a framed photograph of Mr. Tuckerman. These volumes, enclosed in a casket of ebony and cedar, will be perpetually preserved in the library in memory of that accomplished scholar and good man. During this year, the society seem to have been saddened and appalled by the frequent demise of many of their prominent friends; among whom were John Carter Brown, Robert H. Ives and Edward King.

From 1861 to 1875, inclusive, the additions to the Library have been constant and numerous, ranging each year from four hundred to fifteen hundred volumes, besides many pamphlets. During these fifteen years

the total acquisitions have been nearly twelve thousand volumes, for the larger portion of which, by far, the Library stands indebted to generous donors, prominent among whom are Messrs. Robert H. Ives, James T. Rhodes, George A. Hammett, David Sears, Sidney Brooks, James Lenox, Henry Ledyard, J. Carter Brown, R. C. Winthrop, George Calvert, J. R. Bartlett, William Hunter, E. D. Morgan, H. B. Anthony and T. A. Jenckes.

During these years, also, valuable and interesting additions have been made to the art treasures of the Library, including statuary, paintings and engravings. The paintings are mostly portraits of persons having either a local or national fame, thus rendering the gallery one of rich historical interest.

In the early part of the year 1876, the new structure of stone and brick was completed. It furnishes an admirable room for library and gallery purposes, 36 feet wide, by 48 feet long, and thirty feet high; and a room on the south, 17 feet by 22 feet, for the use of the directors. Thus ample room is supplied for pictures, statuary, and library purposes for many years to come. The whole structure may be considered as classical and ornate; and though planned by three successive artists, has been made to conform as much as possible to the design of the original architect. The library company has expended \$31,696.03, to which sum must be added the subsequent expenses of re-arranging the gallery and library, of repairing the fences and of ornamenting the grounds, and now offers to the public admirable galleries of painting and sculpture; and a library of twenty-one thousand volumes, many of them costly works, and the rare acquisitions of generations of growth.

We have traced in few and brief words, the career of one of the oldest institutions in the country. The liberality of individuals has sustained it through periods of adversity and prosperity, through changes in political and social life, and vicissitudes in the fortune and character of individuals and families. From the beginning to the present time, the Redwood Library, always from the first, highly respectable in the public eye, has gradually increased in true power and in growing adaptation to the wants and necessities of the community. It is now placed on a firm foundation, with ample means of progressive improvement. It sprung at first almost full armed, from a period of great commercial prosperity. It is associated with our first attempts in America at culture and scholarship, with early recollections of learning and piety, and with splendid memories that may never die. Whatever may be its position and resources in the future, it can never forget the debt it owes to the thought-

fulness, the learning and the intelligence of the past. We conclude with a list of the presidents from 1747 to 1876 :

Abraham Redwood,	.	.	.	.	from 1747 to 1788.
Henry Marchant,	.	.	.	.	" 1791 to 1796.
William Vernon,	.	.	.	.	" 1796 to 1801.
John Bours,	.	.	.	.	" 1801 to 1809.
Jonathan Easton,	.	.	.	.	" 1809 to 1813.
Robert Stevens,	.	.	.	.	" 1813 to 1830.
David King,	.	.	.	.	" 1830 to 1836.
Audley Clarke,	.	.	.	.	" 1836 to 1844.
George G. King,	.	.	.	.	" 1844 to 1846.
William Hunter,	.	.	.	.	" 1846 to 1849.
David King,	.	.	.	.	" 1849 to 1859.
George G. King,	.	.	.	.	" 1859 to 1870.
William C Cozzens,	.	.	.	.	" 1870 to 1872.
Henry Ledyard,	" 1872 to 1874.
Edward King,	" 1874 to 1875.
Francis Brinley,	" 1875 to 1876.

King, David

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